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ABSTRACT

The story of the conquest of Mexico, Mezo-America, and South America is widely known, and most of the known traditions are referred to as historical events and in the past tense. "El Dia de los Muertos," however, is a perfect example of the blending of two cultures or transculturation. To ignore what California's large Hispanic population brings to the United States would be grievous. Therefore, this curriculum project is for teachers who do not have local libraries or school libraries that feature sections on diversity. The project materials are tools that teachers can use to expose non-Hispanic students to an interesting cultural event and to give Latino students public recognition of a pride-filled celebration. It increases cultural awareness and instills in students a willingness to explore and experience a cross-cultural experience. When this background reference reading has been completed by the students, they are asked to build individual or class altars in memory of a departed relative (or even a pet). Detailed instructions for constructions and decoration are included. Contains a relevant vocabulary, a 30-item reading list, a list of videocassettes, and a list of Web sites. (BT)

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El Día de los Muertos

A Reference Module for Elementary and Middle School Students

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El Día de los Muertos

The story of the conquest of Mexico, Mezo-America and South America is widely known and most of the known traditions are refererred to as historical events and in the past tense. However, El Día De los Muertos is a perfect example of a blending of two cultures or 'transculturation.' Mexican immigrants began settling in the United States in waves at different times. Perhaps, the largest 'first wave' was after the war between the Unite States and Mexico in 1848. There are varied predictions of the projected estimate of Hispanics in North America with about 16% of the United States will be Hispanic by 2020.

California has a large Hispanic immigrant population, which is reflected in all of the public schools. To ignore what this population brings to the United States would be grievous. Therefore, this project is to be used as a reference for teachers who do not have local libraries or school libraries that feature sections on diversity. It is by no means an all-inclusive study nor is it a definitive study of 'El Día.' It is a tool that teachers can use to expose non-hispanic students to a wonderful cultural event and is a tool that can give Latino students public recognition of a pride filled celebration. It increases cultural awareness and instills a willingness to explore and experience a cross-cultural experience.

Americans (i.e. those from the United States and hereafter referred to as Americans) tend to equate Halloween and 'El Día.' The greatest similarities are the time of year when they occur and the fact that there are some shared symbols such as skeletons and cemeteries.

Halloween arrived in American with the British and had evolved from a Celtic festival celebrated in the British Isles. It occurred on November 1 and was a time that the

sprits of the dead roamed around freely and involved themselves in the lives of the living. At this time, sacrifices were made, prayers offered, and large bonfires lit to keep the evil spirits away while sacrifices were made to honor the dead and offerings of fruit and vegetables were offered in honor of the dead.

When the Christians arrived, they tried to eradicate this pagan holiday and made November 1 All Saints Day that was set aside to honor the Saints of the Church. This holiday was meant to eliminate Samhain and replace it forever which was part of the Missionary plan of planning holy days to coincide with native holidays. However, this did not happen and people continued to offer food, gifts and libations on All Hallows Eve and then celebrate the Saints' Day on November 1.

When the Spanish arrived and began their conversion of the indigenous people, they too had a day that honored the spirits of their loved ones only it was not a fearsome or evil day like the Celtics. Their day was to honor ancestors and the sprits of children by inviting them back to earth for one day and to offer them food, drink, music and flowers. It was a day that the memory of the dead was honored and their deeds, likes and lives were again part of the living.

It is here that true transculturation occurred for the indigenous never gave up their customs completely and the Spaniards incorporated some of the indigenous customs and what we see evidence of is a perfect blending of two cultures.

Halloween sees spirits as frightening skeletons, spooky scenes and no connection to one's family or one's life. It is merely a holiday that children dress up to fool people, ask for treats and try to scare one's peers. It is fun but certainly does not have the depth of 'El Día.'

'El Día' is a family-centered holiday where adults and children participate in inviting the souls of dead relatives to once again visit and partake of what pleasured them during their lives. It is time when families go to the cemetery to clean the graves and plant flowers, visit, have music and picnic. It is a holiday when families make altars in honor of their loved ones and as a welcome to the beloved spirit of their loved one inviting them to return home for at least this one day. November 1 is the day for honoring the souls of children (angelitos) and November 2 is the day for honoring adult souls. Different practices for this annual remembrance developed regionally, but all contain some element of nature to symbolize the continuity of life (e.g.flowers, pine needles, water,) of spirit (candles, incense) and of remembrance (family visit to the cemetery.)

The altars can be small and modest with just a picture or the departed and perhaps a candle to light the way for the return or they can be elaborate with marigold or other flower petals strewn in a path to lead the way to the doorway of the house.

The classroom can create one altar or individual altars and included in this paper are some simple art activities that any teacher can do with minimal materials. In addition, I have provided a reading list and Webster that provide unlimited information. This paper is merely the first step in joining the celebration.

The purpose of this paper is to give this background to teachers and then to encourage them to have their students either build individual or class altars in memory of a departed relative or even their dog just to learn the continuity of life and that even though the person is no longer around us in body, his/her memory continues within us.

The ofrendas can be placed in cardboard boxes or shoeboxes. However you set it up, it should reflect and make a statement about the life of the departed one.

Students who are going to build an altar should:

- Begin by determining to whom this altar will be dedicated. Many students were lucky enough to have had no experience with death so we determined that it would be all right to have an altar for a dog or a fish just to begin the lifelong experience of participating in this 'Day.'
- Why does the student want the spirit of this person to return? What was special about this person? Why do you want to honor him/her?
- What did this person do or like? What foods would you place on the altar that would make this spirit happy to visit you? What games, books, clothing, tools or religious items would be important to this person?
- What do you want other people to know about your person when they look at your altar?
- What is the title of your altar? Why did you choose that or what do you want it to tell us?

Table of Offerings

Attached to this project is a pattern for making a table that can be part of an ofrenda in a shoebox if each child is making a miniature altar. In addition to the pattern is a photo of a table made from this pattern.

Materials needed:

- 1 piece of cardstock weight paper
- scissors and glue

- buttons to be used as plates
- play dough which will be molded into foods
- candles to be placed on table
- tiny photos of person to be remembered
- 1 paper doilie – to be used as tablecloth
- glue
- cellophane tape
- miniature memorabilia

Procedure: cut out table and fold on dotted lines so that the corners become table legs. Tape and glue so that table stands up. Fold and glue doilie over the table to act as tablecloth. Glue buttons to tablecloth. They represent plates. Roll and mold playdough or clay into food and/or flower shapes. Place on buttons so that it looks like food is sitting on buttons. Put table in shoebox to form diorama. Use small balls of clay to act as candle holders. Paste photos of deceased either on outside or inside of box.

Crepe Paper Flower

Materials:

- Wire strips about 10 inches long
- Orange and yellow crepe paper cut in 3inch widths

The crepe paper must be folded like an accordion so that entire length of paper is no larger than 3 inches. The wire is then put around the center of the paper and twisted.

Now, the paper must be pulled apart at the edges so that it forms a flower. See attached photo of a yellow and orange marigold. This is difficult to explain but is clear after you look at the picture.

VOCABULARY

Altars - ofrendas

Day - día

Dead - muerto

Of - de

Skeletons – esqueletos, calaveras

Marigolds - cempasuchitl

Angels -angelitos

Flowers - flores

Bread - pan

Tissue paper cutouts – papel picado

Water - agua

In addition to these activities which I personally participated in, the bibliography contains different craft books that have directions for making papel picado, skeletons, skulls, bread of the dead and costumes.

PICTURE GRIDS

This interactive line-up is directed at giving students the opportunity to interact verbally with other students in the class. Students are encouraged to describe a national holiday rather than a religious holiday. In that way, they will exchange information about their cultures rather than their religions, sic: Transculturation.

Students fold paper to make a grid with eight boxes. The teacher directs the students to draw pictures related to their favorite holiday. After the pictures are drawn, students line up in two lines, facing each other, and discuss their pictures with the person standing directly across from them. Then, they change partners by line A moving up two people and line B staying in the same place. Repeat conversation with new person and then rotate again. Mexican children will be encouraged to focus on Day of the Dead.

On an 8.5 X 11 piece of paper, fold in eight sections as shown below:

1. Draw a symbol for your favorite holiday.
2. Draw the people you like to celebrate this holiday with.
3. Draw a picture of what you wear on this holiday.
4. Draw a picture of what you like to eat on this holiday.
5. Draw a picture of what you like to do on this holiday.
6. Draw a picture of where you like to celebrate this holiday.
7. Write the three things that you like most about this holiday.
8. Write the thing that you like least about this holiday.

(1)	(5)
(2)	(6)
(3)	(7)
(4)	(8)

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I have included some pictures that I took when I visited some ofrendas made by classrooms of children. These should be viewed just as the two projects I also took photos of. On the reading list, there are remarkable craft books that should be looked at. The Garza, Rich and Salinas books were outstanding and should be part of the classroom library even if the teacher has to buy one herself. I did not copy any of the projects from these books. However, I have included a few projects that did appear in any of the books but that I was given by classroom teachers.

SYMBOLS

Copal – sacred incense of Mesoamerican cultures

Flowers – symbolize life and regeneration

Marigolds – flower that symbolizes death to the Mexican people

Candles – attract the souls to the ofrendas

Sugar skulls – represent deceased family members and friends. They remind us of our own eventual deaths

Bread of the Dead – the figures represent the dead and the breads provide nourishment for both the living and the dead

Water – quenches the thirst of the visiting souls

Foods – attract and 'feed' the visiting souls

READING LIST

Amado, Elisa, et al. Barrilete: A Kite for the Day of the Dead Groundwood Books

Ancona, George Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta of the Days of the Dead Lothrop Lee and Shepard Publishing

Andrade, Mary J. (Photographer), Jose Murguia, (Illustrator). Day of the Dead "The Little Angels Vigil – La Velacion de los Angelitos" LA Oferta Inc.

Andrade, Mary J. Day of the Dead Through the Eyes of the Soul - Mexico City LA Oferta Inc.

Andrade, Mary J. (Photographer). Through the Eyes of the Soul, Day of the Dead in Mexico – Michoacan LA Oferta Inc.

Andrade, Mary J. Through the Eyes of the Soul, Day of the Dead – Oaxaca LA Oferta Inc.

Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer. The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico University of Texas Press

*Garza, Carmen Lomas Making Magic Windows: Creating Cut-Paper Art With Carmen Lomas Garza Children's Book Press

Gonzalez-Crussi, Frank The Day of the Dead: And Other Mortal Reflections (A Harvest Book) Harvest Books Inc.

Greenleigh, John (Photographer) and Rosalind Rosoff Beimier. The Days of the Dead: Mexico's Festival of Communion with the Departed Pomegrante Press, Inc.

Harris, Zoe & Suzanne Williams. Piñatas and Smiling Skulls. Pacific View Press, Berkeley

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane and Lawrence Migdale (Photographer) Day of the Dead: A Mexican-American Celebration Holiday House Press

Hyams, Gina, et al. Day of the Dead Box Chronicle Books

Johnston, Tony and Jeanette Winter Day of the Dead Voyager Books, 2000

Kindersley, Barnabas and Anabel. Celebrations, DK Publishing, Indiana 1997

Lasky, Kathryn, and Christopher G. Knight (Photographer). Days of the Dead Hyperion Press, 1991

Levy, Janice, et al. The Spirit of Tio Fernanco: A Day of the Dead Story /El Espiritu De Tio Fernando: Una Historia Del Dia De Los Muertos Albert Whitman & Company

Lowery, Linda and Barbara Knutson (Illustrator). Day of the Dead (On My Own Holiday) Carolrhoda Books

Luenn, Nancy and Robert Chapman (Illustrator). A Gift for Abuelita/Un Regalo Para Abuelita: Celebrating the Day of the Dead, En Celebracion Del Dia De Los Muerton Rising Moon Publishers

Milne, Jean. Fiesta Time in Latin America, Ward Ritchie Press

Krull, Kathleen and Enrique O. Sanchez. Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead: Los Dias de Los Muertos. New York: Toronto: Macmillan, Maxwell Macmillan, 1994.

*Rich, Chris The Book of Paper Cutting: A Complete Guide to All the Techniques - With More Than 100 Project Ideas Lark Books

Ruiz, Efrain Cortes, The Days of the Dead: A Mexican Tradition, Mexico, D.F, GV Editores, 1988. (English and Spanish)

*Salinas-Norman, Bobbi. Indo Hispanic Folk Art Traditions II- A book of culturally based year around activities with emphasis on the Day of the Dead. Redston Editions, 1994.

Sayer, Chloe. The Mexican Day of the Dead: An Anthology

Silverthorne, Elizabeth. Fiesta! Millbrook Press

Story of Mexico, La Historia de México en Español y en Inglés, Un Libro Para Pintar, Bellerophon Books

*Trenchard, Kathleen Mexican Papercutting: Simple Techniques for Creating Colorful Cup-Paper Projects Lark Books

Vicente, Luis San. Festival of the Bones/El Festival de las Calaveras: The Book for the Day of the Dead

Wade, Dodson Mary. El Dia De Los Muertos/the Day of the Dead (Rookie Read - About Holidays)

VIDEOCASSETTES

Day of the Dead 1997 1997 791.4372

Hoyt-Goldsmith, Diane Day of the Dead: a Mexican-American Celebration, J394.264

Mexican Indian Legends 1976 sd. Color 22 minutes

Mexican Way of Life 1986 sd. Color 23 minutes

Mexican Way of Life (The Way of Life Series) 1995 sd. Color 23 minutes

Mexico: the Heritage (Mexico Today) 1991 sd. Color 21 minutes

Mexico: The Nation (Mexico Today) 1991 sd. Color 23 minutes

Mexico: The People (Mexico Today) 1991 sd. Color 20 minutes

Mexico Vivo – Programs 1 through 3 1990 sd. Color 72 minutes

Mexico Vivo – Programs 4 through 5 1990 sd. Color 48 minutes

La Muerte Viva: Produced by Ma. Victoria Llamas & Asociados, Mexico, D.F., 28 minutes

La Ofrenda: Produced by Lourdes Portillo, San Francisco, CA

WEBSITES

HTTP://WWW.mexonline.com/daydead.htm

HTTP://WWW.publiciastate.edu/~risalvad/scmfaq/muertos.html

http//www.holidays/halloween/muertos.htm

http//www.azcentral.xom/ent/dead/

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* In my opinion, these books are necessities.

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